

Last Minute Repairs

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Summary: (H:R) Finding Forerunner relics and keeping a massive base running requires a lot of engineers. Harsh conditions are too much for most humans. The UNSC assigns Artifex team to Sword Base's repair and response team from 1/1/2552 - 1/1/2554. Too bad standing orders have nothing to do with a Covenant invasion... (On hold)

1. Opening (v2)

Summary and Opening

* * *

><p>"Spartan-257. Relax."<p>

The Spartan III in green and orange painted armor shifted his feet to shoulder-width and put his hands behind his back. Technically parade rest, but he couldn't bring himself to completely relax.

"Maxwell, honestly."

"Yes, ma'am..." said the Spartan, shifting to appear more relaxed.

"Now, listen. I'm preparing something big. I know you're assigned to the repair and response team here at Sword Base. I'm going to have to ask you to remove your helmet."

The woman who was speaking to the Spartan tapped a few times on her data-pad. Spartan-257 removed his helmet as asked, revealing his buzzed hair and serious default expression.

"Dr. Halsey is on her way. She thinks we can make something out of these relics we found in the ice. If she says so, I agree with her. She hasn't always been the most focused on data, despite being a brilliant scientist. I'm willing to trust her instincts. As head researcher, I am making a personal request of you and your squad.

Will you hear me out?"

"Of course, ma'am," said Maxwell. He knew very well who Dr. Halsey was. She hadn't been part of the Spartan III program, so he didn't know her like some of the Spartan II's he'd met did, but her name carried plenty of weight regardless.

"Things are going to get very hectic. We're in the process of rotating out our base A.I. I want your squad to be at Halsey's beck and call. If something goes wrong; if those relics become a threat for any reason, I want your squad to make sure her plans go through. Failing that, I want you to make sure everyone gets out alive. There've been rumors of Insurrectionists attacking colonies. Only last week they stole two entire ships from Harmony. Can you do that?"

Now Maxwell knew why she'd had him remove his helmet. No one could spy on them with the helmet's sensors disconnected from the suit's power supply. He thought it over.

"Ma'am, if something that bad happens, and our standing orders aren't changed to intercept the threat, I think I can find something to fix close to a combat zone... After all, bullets and grenades aren't gentle on equipment..."

The scientist smiled and thanked him. Neither of them knew exactly what had just been ensured, with the coming of the Covenant looming invisibly to everyone on Reach...

* * *

><p>))Squad Report(((<p>

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><p>))Artifex Squad(((<p>

Artifex 1, Spartan-A257, Maxwell

Designated pilot, general mechanics and engineering specialist

GUNGNIR class helmet, shoulders, leg units. Chest is high altitude, low opening gear. Armor customized with Universal Global Positioning System module, wrist mounted; leather leg case.

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><p>Artifex 2, Spartan-B219, Gabriel<p>

Designated driver, vehicular mechanics specialist.

Hazop CBRN class helmet, Mk.4 Grenadier chest-plate and leg units, Mk.5 experimental shoulder armor. Customized with reinforced arm bracers, composite leg armor.

* * *

><p>Artifex 3, Spartan-A138, Halt<p>

Designated sniper, weapon mechanics specialist.

Pilot helmet, UA/HUL3 model. Sniper class shoulders, Tactical Recon chest-plate, FJ/PARA knee guards. Armor customized with UGPS and tactical "hardcase."

* * *

><p>Artifex 4, Spartan-B314, Sean<p>

Electronics and computer specialist. Received commendations for previous defensive engagement.

Commando UA model helmet, Operator shoulders, Commando chest-plate, GUNGNIR leg units. Armor customized with wrist mounted tactical readout, leg mounted trauma kit.

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><p>Artifex 5, Spartan-B-121, Jak<p>

Physics specialist. Previously assumed control of UNSC ship in danger of crash due to navigation system failure.

CQB helmet, Base Security shoulders, Breacher chest-plate and wrist-mounted ammo holder. GUNGNIR leg units. Armor customized with leg mounted leather case.

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><p>Artifex 6, Spartan-A316, Tristan<p>

Armor systems specialist, previous MJOLNIR armor system design team member, honorary ODST.

Mk.5 experimental helmet and shoulders, Base Security chest-plate, FJ/PARA knee guards. Armor customized with wrist mounted tactical readout, leg mounted "hardcase."

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><p>)))Squad reassigned to Office Of Naval Intelligence, Sword Base(((<p>

)))January 2552 â€" January 2554(((

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><p>Event 1: Halcyon Days Gone coming soon...<p>

2. Event 1

Event 1: Halcyon Days Gone

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><p>"Alright, pass down the last one," said Maxwell, Spartan-A257 over the comms. He was hanging over and under a reinforced catwalk of sorts, thick cables attached to hard-points on his GUNGNIR armor. Up

above and out of sight, his other five team members prepared a large pipe with similar wires and started lowering it.<p>

"Wanna remind me why we can't use machinery here!?" said Jak, Spartan-B121. He, like everyone else, had a death-grip on a cable and was slowly letting it slip out of his grasp to lower it.

"It's not 'cause the power's out or anything, Jak," said Halt, Spartan-A138.

Below, Maxwell swung up some momentum, grabbed the grate which the pipe would rest behind, and leveraged himself to grab the replacement.

"Left side a bit lower," he instructed, reaching out for it.

Tristan, Spartan-A316, growled in frustration. "Would you hurry up!? This thing isn't exactly light!"

"Ahh, quit complaining," said Spartan-B219, Gabriel. He was a bit taller than the others, and a fair measure stronger. As a Spartan, even a Spartan III, that was saying something.

"Got it! Get ready!" said Maxwell, starting to guide the pipe in. It had to make it into the gap, but not fall. Both required more of the cable.

"Ok, go!" yelled Maxwell, pulling hard. His team let the cable slide, letting him swing the pipe behind the grate, horizontal like it needed to be.

"Perfect! I'm disconnecting the cables," said Maxwell.

"We should check in as soon as we're done here," said Spartan-B314, Sean.

"Agreed. Eggheads might have busted something else," said Tristan.

"Wish something would bust them every once and a while," said Halt, stretching out his strained arms and back.

Maxwell pushed the pipe into place and started fixing the fist-sized screws. Inside the pipe were prearranged conductors which carried power to their current tunnel and the entire tram system that lead in and out of the dig site. All the screws in place, Maxwell kicked the pipe once, to see if it would move. Nothing.

"Alright, Sean, check power and check outside comms," said Max, bundling the cables he was attached to and climbing back up.

Sean, a Beta-company Spartan III, was the team's electrical and computer specialist. Not many Spartans knew their way around machines aside from driving them and using them for combat. Artifex team was comprised of rare Spartans with the training for fixing as well as breaking, and each of them had a specialized skill. Normally, Spartan III's were for nothing but combat. Here at ONI Sword Base, half-buried on Reach, Artifex team was a team of Spartans who fought cold, ice, and every tiny mechanical issue the local science teams

could think up. Human engineering teams had suffered too many injuries and deaths to continue maintaining the base efficiently and safely, so Spartans had been called in out of sheer necessity.

* * *

><p>"One, you're not gonna like this," said Sean, talking to Artifex 1, Maxwell.<p>

"What now?" asked Maxwell, disconnecting the cables from his armor.

"Covenant," said Sean, as if that answered everything.

For the team, it did. No Covenant had been close to Sword Base. Apparently, that had changed since they'd lost and restored power to the tunnel.

"Damn it!" said Jak and Tristan, letting the rest of the team listen in stereo.

"Have we received any new orders?!" said Maxwell, throwing his cables into the service cart they'd been using.

"Nothing yet, other than standing orders. Noble's been dispatched," said Sean, his small, heavily reinforced laptop casting a glow on his Commando helmet's visor and up-armored cap.

"Noble? Didn't they _just _get a new team member?" asked Jak.

"They did. He's a pilot, like you, One."

"Yeah, that's all great, but do they expect us to hang out down here and splice wires until we light the Covies on fire while they do all the fighting?!" said Tristan.

"Hey, look on the bright side," said Gabriel, "If they come down here looking for anything at the dig site, we get to say 'hello.'"

"Pray that doesn't happen. Sean, keep an ear out, but pack it up. We gotta get moving," said Maxwell.

"Should we at least start carrying our weapons?" asked Halt.

"Depends on where we work down here. Do you want to be the one lugging around a case or weapons while we work, especially down at the base of the ruins?" asked Maxwell.

"If it means being ready, yes," answered Halt.

"Nah, if we got permission, I'd carry 'em," volunteered Gabriel.

"While I agree we should, I just don't like the idea of carrying weapons and ammo everywhere with us. If we work near the dig site and we lose that case, not only would we lose custom weapons and ammo, we'd get chewed up and spit out by the CO," explained Maxwell.

"So we leave the case somewhere close and safe. It locks, remember?"

said Tristan.

Maxwell shook his head. He sighed into the comm and nodded.

"Let's get moving, then. We need to ask for permission before some new job comes up."

* * *

><p>While the rest of the team returned the service cart, Maxwell split off after they exited the tram system and headed for the main research building. It took some explaining, but he got permission to pack up his team's gear in a lock-box and bring it with them in case of a surprise attack. If Sword Base was digging up fossils or resources, it probably wouldn't have worked. But a Forerunner structure was bound to draw Covenant attention sooner rather than later. Maxwell radioed his team to meet at the munitions building. He told them to bring a lock-box from the engineering building...<p>

"Every time I see that thing I debate with myself if you're a genius or crazy," said Jak, staring at Halt's weapon.

"It is pretty stupid," said Halt, admiring it. "'Spartan Model 001, Azure Instant.'"

Halt held in his hands a frankensteined sniper rifle unlike anything the other Spartans had ever seen. Taking the idea of a rotating twin barrel from the M41 SSR MAV/AW, a modern rocket launcher, the SM001 had a barrel that handled normal 14.5mm rounds and high-power rounds like the SRS99 it was made from. The other barrel, currently on the bottom, was able to hold even larger bullets, and had to be connected to a Spartan's MJOLNIR armor just to have enough power to fire. By rotating the barrels, separate from the scope, trigger and stock, Halt could change from blowing holes in Sangheili armor to blowing holes in Phantom drop-ships. Halt had to order rounds custom for the larger barrel and chamber, since no other weapon used them. The first barrel was standard enough, but the second barrel was much longer. To carry the weapon, Halt had to place it dead center on his back's magnetic grips just to keep the longer barrel from hitting the floor.

"I like it," said Tristan. "That thing's got character, even if it does look like it'd make a better hammer than a sniper rifle. Plus, I've seen you practice with that thing. Gotta fix the walls when you're done on the range with that thing."

"Not even those damned Hunters appreciate this thing. Well, until they've got worm guts spraying from the front and back of their armor," said Halt, placing the rifle securely in the lock-box on the far right.

"You can keep your freak rifle," said Gabriel, walking over. "I'll keep my rocket launcher."

With that he secured his M41 and a few cases holding the rockets.

"You two are just overdoing it," said Jak, putting his MA37 Assault Rifle and M45 Tactical Shotgun in the lock-box. His ammo cases didn't

even take up the space of one of Gabriel's.

"I think you all need to shut up!" said Tristan, laughing. He had spec-ops gear from working with ODS'Ts. Being one himself didn't help his ego, but he deserved it. He placed an M7S Suppressed SMG and an M6C/SOCOM silenced pistol and their ammo into the case.

Sean and Maxwell had standard issue stuff, just an MA37 and M6G Magnum sidearm. Sean had to worry about his laptop anyway, which he usually kept in a pack attached to the small of his back. Maxwell had a captured Kig-Yar arm-mounted shield unit. After hours of messing with the alien thing, he'd gotten it to interface with his armor's power system. He wouldn't risk anything more than charging the unit out of combat, however, since overuse might mess with his armor's standard shield system.

* * *

><p>"Got anything Sean?" asked Maxwell, closing the lock-box and fitting it with a few durable straps. A service cart would be needed to carry it, or two Spartans.<p>

"Just a few reports of shorts from melting ice, a ventilation duct not responding, and some computer failures. Usual stuff," reported Sean, looking at his laptop again.

"We should deal with the vent first, then the shorts. The scientists won't die without basic computers while they wait. Besides, their work's backed up automatically anyway, so they can just find a different computer."

"Please tell me the vent is somewhere away from the dig site," said Jak.

"It's actually up in the main base. Looks like the vent that cools the base A.I.," said Sean.

"Well, then let's go pay Auntie Dot a visit! I'm sure she misses us!" said Halt.

"I got the cart," said Gabriel, grabbing the hand-bar and starting to push.

"Can I have a ride," said Halt, tilting his up-armored Pilot helmet like a little kid begging for candy.

"You can... If you want to carry that case on your back," said Gabriel, unpolarizing his Hazop helmet and showing his bored expression.

Halt straightened, turned around, and started walking.

"Thought so," said Gabriel, polarizing his visor again.

The team headed up to the elevator system that would take them all the way up to Sword Base. It was a long ride, and the team was getting edgy from the news Sean passed on. He was monitoring open communications, and it sounded like the fighting was close to Sword Base. Edgy turned to combat-readiness when the entire base shook just as Artifex Team reached the ramp to the vent they needed to

service.

"The hell was that?!" said Tristan.

"The window!" said Jak, pointing.

Everyone looked out the massive window in the main room of Sword Base. There, floating in the clouds and bearing down on the base, was a Covenant heavy-class corvette.

"Gabe, get that weapon case to the A.I. room and pop it, now! Tristan and Jak, go with him! Sean, I want an update on Dot's status! Halt, get all the scientists to the tram and send them to the dig site, then shut down the system until it's safe. We don't have much time! Move!"

Artifex team splintered and hurried to their tasks. Sean went to a nearby computer and used it to begin interface with the base A.I. instead of using his laptop. A direct line was faster than wireless.

"Everyone run a check on suit integrity and get your shields online! We won't be doing any more electrical work. I don't want to see anyone underestimating the situation. If that corvette's inbound, so are ground troops, and our armor won't stop plasma from boiling us alive," said Maxwell over the comms.

"Dot's green, One," reported Sean.

"Good. How's the heat level? Do we need to fix the vent right away?"

"No, the heat's fine. Actually, the vent was stuck open. The caution was about the temperature getting too low. But Dot's going hot now, so that vent needs to stay that way."

"Right, so secondary. Now comms, what's going on?"

"We won't have comms for long. Covenant ground forces are pushing really hard on the anti-air guns and the comm relay. Noble's on the way here, but at this rate we'll be dark for a while."

"What about ground lines?"

"We should be able to keep in touch with local facilities with directional laser communications, and the dig site is hard-wired so we'll stay green with them too."

"Good enough, considering wireless with the outside will go out. Our primary objective right now needs to be protecting the scientists and locking down the dig site. Covies are probably here for whatever we've found down there and I don't feel like explaining why they didn't run into technical difficulties."

"Weapons popped, One!" said Gabriel.

"Send Tristan with Four's gear and mine," said Maxwell.

He heard a shotgun being pumped, the sound labeled as coming from Jak's comm.

"Roger that, Artifex Five."

"Scientists are away. Waiting for them to arrive before shutting down the system, then I'll regroup," reported Halt.

"You won't be here long, Three. You and Tristan'll be heading outside on the ridge to report on troop advancements. First contact's on you two while we get this place locked down."

"Yes, sir."

"Gabe, Jak, you stick to that A.I. until I can fix that vent. Once Dot's fully functional we're moving her down to the dig site too. Make sure her transport rig is good to go."

"On it," said Jak.

Auntie Dot had her own transit track down to the dig site for emergencies. Whoever thought up that one, Maxwell wanted to shake their hand. Once the A.I. was moved, Artifex team could worry about just defending the way to the dig site.

The base shook again, hard enough to put Maxwell on one knee for balance.

"That corvette isn't gonna wait much longer! Let's move it, Artifex!"

"Quit your yelling, we're moving!" said Tristan, appearing with his and Sean's gear.

"Thanks. Now meet up with Halt. You heard what I said earlier," said Max, splitting the ammo between himself and Sean.

"Yeah, yeah, Halt's gonna squash some heads while I play killer shadow, I heard."

"Comms down," said Sean.

"How's anti-air?" asked Maxwell.

"Going down any second. There's an Elite general-class out there."

"Covies aren't messing around, are they?" said Jak.

"Neither are we," said Gabriel.

"Hey, watch where you point that!" yelled Jak.

"Sorry," said Gabriel, probably already shouldering his rocket launcher.

"Quit the jokes. Halt?"

"Still waiting on the scientists to arrive," said Halt.

"We might have to keep the system active in case survivors fall back to the base. The scientists here on base aren't the only ones at

local facilities. We've got Marines and Army unbound too," said Sean.

"I'm willing to bet this fight's coming right to us," said Maxwell.

* * *

><p>Soon, as expected, Marines and fleeing personnel were requesting to enter the base. Artifex team let them in and did their best to find them places to hide or defend. In less than an hour, Covenant ground forces were on their doorstep, invading with full force. Whatever they wanted, they wanted it fast. From Sean's reports, there weren't enough for it to be a planet-wide invasion, so Sword Base was important. With the Covenant corvette ready to melt them all to the ground and two Hunter pairs knocking on the door, Artifex team bunkered down for the assault on Sword Base...<p>

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><p>Event 2: Noble Sweep coming soon...<p>

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><p>Author Note: The Spartans depicted are based on some of my friends from Xbox Live. We might not be engineers, but otherwise, this is accurate to our play-style, and will remain that way. I won't be stretching much in this fic, but I will explain the happenings of The Fall Of Reach related to Sword Base and the surrounding area that Halo Reach didn't address. If you've got suggestions, or an opinion you don't want in a review, PM me. Next chapter will be up after my Dark Souls and SAO fics are updated.<p>

3. Event 2

Event 2: Noble Sweep

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><p>"Artifex Team, this is Artifex Actual, you are hereby ordered to break off from the invading Covenant force and return to the relic site. Covenant air forces are inbound and preparing a landing operation to surpass the base entirely."<p>

Maxwell looked at Sean, crouched behind a golden statue in the atrium of Sword Base with him.

"You heard the Colonel, Artifex! Halt, Tristan, get back inside ASAP. Gabe, Jak, what's DOT's status?!"

"Aww, but I was havi-" started Tristan, interrupted.

"We got a moment, so she's away. She'll reach the dig site in less than five minutes," said Jak.

"And as Tristan was saying, WE were having fun," said Halt, a round firing over the comms.

"Orders are orders, and we're the only other Spartan team here. Sean

and I will get to the tram and be ready for you guys. Good thing we didn't shut it down."

Maxwell motioned with his head toward the ramp behind himself and Sean. Sean nodded and they rounded the statue. Maxwell stayed low, Sean behind him, and activated his stolen Kig-Yar arm-mounted shield. Already charged, it snapped on at full power, but it was limited. Maxwell only charged it out of the line of fire, fearing messing with his armor's native shield system. A hail of plasma hit the shield, explosive pink needles bouncing off. When the two made it to the ramp, Sean lobbed a grenade over the shield, popped up, and fired back to suppress. A second before the grenade exploded, Sean and Maxwell turned away to run up the ramp. The grenade blew up just as the firing continued, stopping it again long enough for the two Spartan III's to make it out of the line of fire. Through a security door, Maxwell and Sean were now relatively safe, sprinting for the tram system that would take them back to the massive dig site under the ice near Sword Base.

* * *

><p>Artifex One and Four didn't have to wait long before their team arrived, and at just about the same time. They immediately activated the tram and began planning their defense.<p>

"Covies will probably beat us there. If they do, we need to push them off the dig site before we can defend it properly. If I know the Covenant, they'll be sending more than enough forces to take it, meaning what beats us there isn't the last of them. Jak, Tristan, and I will push off those already close. Gabriel, Sean, and Halt will take care of the air defense. We do this right, and not even that Covenant corvette will make a difference."

Maxwell reported his plans, everyone checked their weapons and ammo, and in moments the tram arrived. As expected Covenant were already pressing in close to the laboratories in front of the tram exit. As the Spartans ran for their jobs, another dropship came down through a break in the icy ceiling high above.

"I'll get air-defenses up as soon as possible, One," said Sean.

"I'll secure the armory. Gonna need more rockets," said Gabriel.

"Max! There's an equipment box up ahead! Armor mods!" reported Tristan.

"Mark it. Two, Three, and Four will need it later. We need it now," said Maxwell.

An arrow appeared on his helmet's heads-up display.

The Spartan's reached the box, finding it sealed shut.

"No time!" said Jak, shoving the barrel of his shotgun into the gap of the box, planting his foot on it and wrenching it open by force.

Maxwell and Tristan took it in stride; Jak always made things work,

one way or another.

Tristan removed several of the armor modules, quickly wiring them to himself and his team mates. An armor systems specialist, Tristan had even helped work on the next model of Spartan armor, MJOLNIR Mk.5.

Maxwell was outfitted with yet another shield type, a drop shield that created a temporary dome with a meter radius. Jak got a hologram emitter, perfect for distractions. Tristan himself took a stolen Covenant stealth module. With it active he had to divert power from his motion tracker and sound system, but it made him nearly invisible.

Artifex One, Five, and Six left the equipment box behind and ran for where the gun-fire was already coming from. Covenant had dropped in several light vehicles, a few Kig-Yar jackel squads lead by Jiralhanae brutes. They weren't the worst of it. In the approaching dropship, two Mgalekgolo hunters stood waiting to join the fight. A nightmare for any human troops, those Hunters would be tough to take down with all the other infantry shooting around them at the same time. To make matters even worse, hordes of Unggoy grunts were clambering over the ice to approach the dig site. Grunts were very weak, and needed gas masks to breathe, but they came by the thousands. There were even stories of them flinging themselves over the bodies of their dead comrades to kill the enemy with sheer weight of numbers. Squads ran out of ammo before killing every one of them.

"Tristan, I want those Brutes gone. Jak, do something to stop those Grunts or slow them down. I'll handle the Jackels and distract the Brutes. Halt, you read?!" asked Maxwell.

"I hear ya, One," responded Halt.

"Get on the roof of a lab and tell me if you can get a shot on our location. I have two Hunters I need gone."

"Roger that."

* * *

><p>Max, Tristan, and Jak broke formation and headed for their objectives. Jak spied a Spartan Laser, a WAV M6 G/GNR, and ran for it. It gave him an idea. Tristan began flanking the advancing squads of Brutes and Jackels. Maxwell, on the other hand, rounded to face them head-on, joining the human infantry already there. The Marines had come early to secure the dig site, and had already been hit hard. The moment Maxwell showed his armored guise, the remaining Marines reacted as if they'd won the lottery.

"Spartan?! Hell yeah!" yelled one, closest to Maxwell. He assumed it was to announce him to the rest of the Marines firing and being fired upon.

"Marines! We need those Brutes looking this way! Mind?!" broadcasted Maxwell.

One Marine opened a weapon case with a mounted turret system folded inside.

"I think we can lend you a hand with that, Spartan."

Two marines set up the turret and hooked up the belt for the ammo.

"May I?" asked Maxwell.

"Damn, don't ask just shoot!" said one of the Marines.

Maxwell did so, standing behind the gun and opening fire. The advancing Brutes and Jackels ducked behind the arm-mounted shields the Jackels carried. As soon as Maxwell had them distracted he saw Tristan's IFF tag float out of cover and snatch plasma grenades off the belt of a Brute. Before the hulking armored thing could react, one of his own grenades was primed on the back of his helmet and Tristan was gone. The Brute vanished in a blue flash of superheated plasma and the Jackel squad protecting him was fried by the heat. Stealing more grenades as he went, Tristan did the same to every ducking squad. Maxwell made sure to fire just ahead of where he'd be to avoid hitting him and keep the squad he was attacking distracted. The last squad fell when one of the Jackel's shields failed to fend off the hail of turret rounds, popping and letting the bullets rip the squad apart. With the two Jackels left after one was shredded along with their Brute leader, Tristan simply fired two controlled bursts from his silenced SMG and their story ended.

"Jak, how're those-" started Maxwell, seeing the Grunts advancing up the icy hill next. The turret was halfway through its ammo supply, and even it wouldn't be enough to stop the advancing mass of bodies.

Maxwell stopped talking when he saw the red laser from Jak's weapon hit the approaching dropship's engine. No longer air-worthy, it pitched left and down. The Hunters inside jumped out, slamming to the snow just in time to avoid the crash. The dropship tumbled down the hill, crushing the advancing Grunts in a rolling fireball of alien metal and venting plasma energy.

* * *

><p>"Grunts dealt with, One," reported Jak, needlessly.<p>

"You just pull this shit outta nowhere, you know that?!" said Tristan.

"Hey! Hey. It's called shenanigans, which my armor generates constantly. I gotta use it all on something, don't I!?" responded Jak. It was his excuse for just about any lucky or skillful thing he did.

"Right. Shenanigans. Now, Halt, how about those Hunters?! Do not wanna deal with them!" said Tristan.

"I just got on the roof, alright. Chill. I see them, just give me a second to load my round and zero in. Keep them from advancing much further. There's a facility in the way if they move too much closer."

"You heard him, let's get those things turned around. I think they'll

be happy to face us Spartans instead of an entire squad of Marines," said Maxwell.

To the Marines, he said aloud, "Hold fire. We'll handle the Hunters too. Thanks for holding the fort so long, ya did good."

"You saved our asses, Spartan. Thanks for showing up when you did."

Maxwell said nothing, he just left the turret behind, vaulted over cover, and sprinted forward. Jak was already behind the Hunters, so he started firing at them. The huge enemies had armor made of the same stuff as the Covenant starships. No small-arms bullets were getting through that, not even the turret Maxwell had been using. The shots were to get the Hunters to face him while Maxwell and Tristan approached. The Hunters leveled directed energy weapons at Jak and fired, green radioactive projectiles exploding on the wall next to him as he took cover. Even around the corner, Jak's shields flared. At the same time, Maxwell and Tristan jumped over the Hunters, vaulting right over their "heads." Each Hunter was a colony of large worms working together to fill their armor and move. They communicated with sub-sonic sounds that made the Spartans' chests rumble when they got close. One shot from their energy weapons, and there wouldn't even be a body to bring home. Tristan sprayed his Hunter with his silenced SMG while Max did the same with his MA37 assault rifle.

"Rounds incoming, get clear," said Halt, his voice calm.

Maxwell dodged right and Tristan dodged left, clearing the line of fire for their sniper, far away on the roof of a laboratory.

Halt left his comm on so they would hear the round fire, then count down the delay before a custom high power round ripped right through all the left Hunter's armor, spraying orange stinking worm goo into the snow and toppling the enemy. The worms in the armor lost cohesion, and the Hunter was down for good with some well placed rounds from Maxwell and Tristan. Halt had to load another round into his custom rifle manually, but he was practiced and his team knew it. They held off the remaining Hunter as it bellowed in rage of losing its partner but was forced to protect the gaps in its armor with its shield arm from their suppressive fire. The second round fired, punching through the Hunter's back and hitting its thick shield. The shield arm snapped up from the force and the Hunter landed on its gutted belly. Halt discharged the round casing only after the Hunter fell.

"You're welcome," he said, releasing his comm signal at last.

* * *

><p>Armory secure, scientists safe, and air-defenses up, Artifex team accomplished all objectives in a timely and efficient manner. All witnesses could now tell yet another story of the legendary Spartans. Artifex team headed back to the tram to link up with Noble team, only to find that Noble had completed their objective as well. The Covenant corvette had gone down moments before, thanks to Noble clearing the skies and directing the shot for orbital defense. Just like that the Covenant's forward assault force was wiped out. Now came the messy job of cleaning up... And fixing everything that was

broken. Noble team might get to rest, but Artifex was now stuck with repairing the more dangerous locations of Sword Base damaged during the battle...<p>

* * *

><p>Event 3: Extra Recon coming soon...<p>

4. Event 3

Event 3: Extra Recon

"Recon Delta, do you copy? This is Noble 2. I've been assigned to run this operation. Your orders are to investigate the dark zone along with Recon Bravo. The rest of Artifex team is standing by to rendezvous when you reach the target location."

"This is Artifex 6. We copy. Artifex 6 and 3 on the move," said Tristan.

"Am I the only one with a bad feeling about this?" said Halt, standing in the rock cluster with Tristan holding his giant sniper rifle.

"Nah, I agree. We had Covies, now the Covies are supposed to be gone, but we get a dark zone? This has 'bad idea' written all over it. We should be assaulting, not peeking around corners."

Peeking around the rocks, Tristan and Halt sprinted over the dusty ground to the next cluster. The cliffs to their right were supposed to be where Recon Bravo was operating. Further to the left in the dust was Recon Charlie and the rest of Artifex team. If Halt and Tristan found something bad and needed back-up, they were ready to ride in and reinforce.

"See anything, Halt?" said Tristan over comms.

Halt swung his sniper rifle around the rocks. He had a cord attached to a wrist port that synched with his scope. It made a great blind-fire scope.

"Nothing close, but I see what might be plasma glow in a cave further on."

"Batteries?"

"Not sure. We're gonna have to get in close to find out."

"Roger that," said Tristan. "Noble 2, you read?"

"We hear you, Artifex 6. Go ahead," said Kat.

"We've spotted what might be plasma batteries in a cave up ahead. Heading in to check it out."

"Copy that, Artifex 6. Report contact and findings."

* * *

><p>Tristan and Halt moved quickly and quietly, cover to cover, gliding over the dust and dirt like ghosts. Spartan III's might not have the training and perfection of Spartan II's, but anyone who gave them less credit for that would learn their mistake fast. In less than ten minutes, the two reached the mouth of the cave they'd seen. Halt used his scope camera again to look inside.<p>

"Definitely plasma glow. Any data on where this cave goes?" said Halt.

"We'll search records, Artifex 3. Proceed with caution," responded Noble 2.

"Comm silent," said Tristan. He pulled a single-beam comm relay from his leg-mounted hard-case, setting it down just inside the cave as Recon Delta moved inside. Single-beam communications relays made it possible to have a secure signal as long as the laser emitted could be accessed. Multiple relays could connect to each other to form a network in and out of enemy territory without discovery. Halt and Tristan continued down, both completely silent. Hand signals and three lights inside their helmets became their only form of communication. Green light was confirmation, yellow meant caution or pull back if flashed, but red was almost never used. A tradition from the Spartan II's, no Spartan flashed red unless there was an emergency. For a super-soldier to call something emergency meant time to go, fast. Tristan took point, his silenced SMG aimed. He leaned around a corner since Halt's sniper rifle was too large to go unseen in close quarters. He flashed a yellow light once for Halt. Several Covenant plasma batteries were leaned against the wall, weapon cases further in. There were no enemies, so Tristan blinked a green light and switched places with Halt. Tristan set another laser relay down to keep contact with the outside, then flashed green again. He and Halt moved down the cave, passed enough Covenant guns to arm fifteen squads. Tristan took point again, leaning around the next corner.

Red light. Red light. Red light. Halt stepped back, aiming at the corner over Tristan's shoulder. Tristan started backing up, signaling to retreat with his free hand. Halt remained facing the corner while Tristan went around him and took point on the way out. No more crouching, they ran outside, recovering the laser relay they passed. The second they were outside, Tristan keyed comms.

"We need backup. Now. And I mean NOW," he said.

"What did you see? What happened?" said Halt.

"Report Artifex 6," said Noble 2.

"Covenant refueling station, more Grunts than I cared to count, vehicle depots, and at least three Zealot class squads of Elites. We also have about thirty Ranger class Elites coming up the cave, right at us. Advise!"

"Backup is inbound, Tristan. Find a place to set a beacon. We can't just leave all that down there," said Artifex 1, Maxwell.

"Negative. Pull Recon Delta out when you get there. Leave the beacon, but do not engage. I repeat, do not engage Covenant forces," said Noble 2.

Tristan moved over to climb onto a rock, wedging a small egg-shaped device between it and another rock. It began broadcasting on a low frequency to be located later. Tristan and Halt got under a different rock formation, hiding in its shadow to wait for the rest of their team. Before their backup arrived, however, the Ranger Elites emerged from the cave. They remained for a minute, looking at each other and communicating through their own comm channels. If Sean had been there, he may have attempted to listen in, but he was still on the way with Maxwell, Gabriel, and Jak. Before long the entire squad cloaked and headed for the cliffs, in the general direction of Recon Bravo. Tristan saw the other four of his team appear in range on his heads-up display. Maxwell flashed a green light to confirm they were within range. Tristan confirmed with his own green light. He set down a laser relay and sent comms through that.

"Tell command Recon Bravo has thirty Ranger Elites looking for them, coming from that cave," he said.

"Will do. Collect your relay, we're coming for you," responded Maxwell.

"Close calls. Close calls for everyone," whispered Halt, muffled by his Pilot model helmet. No need for comms that close.

"Yeah, no shit," said Tristan with a chuckle.

"Elites are out of range. Comms free again," reported Maxwell.

"Artifex, command has rescinded my previous order. You're going down there," said Noble 2. She sounded conflicted.

"Ahh, shit," said Gabriel, sounding like someone having to get up for their TV remote.

"What do they want us to do?" said Maxwell.

"Stand-by for a silent drop. You're receiving explosive charges and extra ammunition. Command wants the refueling station and vehicles dealt with, nothing else. Avoid detection, get in, get out, and blow the charges."

"What's the ETA?" asked Maxwell.

"Fifteen minutes, Artifex."

"Well, you heard the lady, guys. If those Rangers exited here, more might come this way. Don't wanna be seen, now do we?" said Maxwell.

* * *

><p>As reported, fifteen minutes later on the dot, a stealth plane flew over and vanished. A supply box parachuted down nearby. Sean and Gabriel got under it and caught it to slow it down before it hit the ground. Not exactly safe, but quieter. Everyone grabbed their gear, Sean taking the explosive charges and storing them in the pack he usually kept his laptop in.<p>

"We go in, comm silent and weapons silent. We leave no bodies. We set the charges, come back to the entrance, blow the place to ashes, and book it out of here. If there's a way to get over-watch, Halt I want you there. No one fire and no one make contact. If we get spotted, there's no making it out," said Maxwell.

"I've still got my Covenant active camo. Mind if I go first?" said Tristan, unpolarizing his ODST helmet.

Maxwell turned to him, his GUNGNIR helmet making the same gesture impossible. He nodded slowly.

Tristan polarized his helmet again, checked his weapons once more, and crouched near the cave mouth.

"No relays this time, Noble 2. We don't have time to worry about 'em," said Maxwell.

"Copy that, Artifex 1. Good luck down there."

"Pfft, luck she says," said Jak, muffled through his CQB helmet.

"Let's go, Artifex," said Maxwell.

The team moved down the tunnel a second time, Tristan out in front again. When they reached the second corner, Tristan started hand-signals. Team member three, head right. Apparently he meant Halt would have an over-watch location to the right after rounding the corner. Maxwell tapped him on the shoulder once, signaling everyone was ready to move in. Tristan activated his camo, signaling them to hold for the green light, and rounded the corner alone. A Covenant constructed ramp lead down to their complex, and a small rock cliff continued to the right of the opening. The cliff was left alone, so Halt could set up there and watch enemy movement. Further down the cliff, a few stalagmites stretched up. There were several ways down, but all of them lead very close to enemies and their targets were either in the center of the cavern or on the far wall. Tristan checked to make sure the area was clear and flashed the green light. The other five rounded the corner, Halt going right on the cliff and keeping low. Gabriel marked vehicles, the refueling station, Grunt gas pumps, and several collections of plasma batteries. Maxwell then numbered the marks in order of importance, the refueling station being highest priority.

Since Sean had the explosives, but the team would need to split in order to complete the mission quickly enough to escape, he handed a few off to Maxwell. Sean and Gabriel moved toward the stalagmites at the right end of the cliff, passing Halt. They would head for the vehicles. Maxwell, Tristan, and Jak climbed down the Covenant ramp's supports, circling left to reach the other side of the cavern and rig the refueling station. Halt set his own marks on the Grunt gas stations, letting everyone know he'd hit those himself with his sniper rifle when the time came.

Halt set up a laser relay and attached it to his sniper rifle barrel. By aiming it at a squad member, he could talk to them, and only them, but they couldn't respond. To confirm, they flashed a green light to him.

Gabriel and Sean made it to their targets first, setting them to blow and backing off. Twice they were almost spotted by wandering Grunts. Grunts needed very cold methane to breath properly, and most of them were under bubbles attached to the gas pumps to breath without carrying their gas tanks and harnesses. By shooting the pumps before they left, Artifex would cripple the vehicle depot's Grunt force.

Maxwell, Tristan, and Jak made it most of the way to their target without a single issue. Only after they'd set their charges did an emergency jump up. Jak flashed a yellow light, watching their rear. A Brute carrying a large crate was walking right towards their current cover point. Tristan, already almost invisible, moved so fast he vanished from his entire squad's sight. The Brute set the crate down where it was needed, thought he saw Maxwell or Jak in their hiding place and took a single step in their direction, squinting in the low light. Before he could move anywhere else he had an arm around his neck and another pushing his nose toward his chest. The move trapped his mouth closed to keep him from yelling out while choking him. Tristan was on the Brute's back, invisible. With a kick of his feet, Tristan dragged the Brute down, choked it out and propped it up against the crate it had been carrying. The Brute had been unarmed, so the Spartan III's left him alone, moving a bit quicker to the exit.

When everyone had finally regrouped at the top of the ramp, Gabriel removed all his marks, leaving only Halt's. Halt flashed green three times, then yellow three times, counting down to red when he would fire. On the third red light, Halt squeezed out three shots, piercing all the methane gas pumps and alerting every single enemy in the cave. As he jumped to his feet, his barrel smoking, Sean hit his detonator. Enemy vehicles disappeared into fire and superheated plasma, and the refueling station began venting high-heat fluid. Enemies close to each target were killed on contact, others nearby were shaken or knocked over, and all the others were blinded by the flashes. The explosions distracted the enemy long enough for Artifex squad to retreat into the narrow cave leading to the surface. The moment they exited the cave, Maxwell contacted Noble 2.

"Noble 2! Mission accomplished! We need out, ASAP!" he said.

"We've got a Pelican on stand-by. ETA is three minutes. Get to the coordinates I'm sending you for extraction. Excellent work, Artifex. Recon Bravo has provided video confirmation of a Covenant invading army and confirmed the Covenant dark-zone. Command is planning a large scale assault in the morning. Your mission just opened the way for the assault."

"We copy, Noble 2. Thanks for the update. Artifex on the move."

* * *

><p>Artifex successfully extracted right on time, escaping the vengeful force of Covenant searching for them near the cave. All they had time to do was get their gear of, eat, and sleep. The next morning, they already had orders to aid with the assault on the Covenant dark-zone. A night of success, all in a day's work for a Spartan team...<p>

* * *

><p>Event 4: Who Needs MAC Rounds?! coming soon...<p>

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><p>Author Note: Please vote on the poll on my profile concerning which of my stories I should continue. I try not to write or continue fanfics that have no meaning or lesson, or that won't entertain my readers. If you enjoy Last Minute Repairs, make sure to vote for it. Thanks for reading... 'Til next time...<p>

End
file.